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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"*****"

Well, the week started out real great, and it has gone way downhill ever since! I got out on the golf course Monday and Tuesday, and enjoyed the nice weather. The middle of the week was damp and cold, and it's stayed that way for the rest of the week. I'm supposed to play in a tournament on Saturday; who knows what we'll see for weather!

On the up side of this weather, I finally got back to working on my indoor projects. If you want to make sure your marriage survives, while in "retirement" mode, you do NOT go out and play golf every day while your wife is still working! It's just common sense, but definitely worth the reminder.

Otherwise, it's been quiet this week. You'll see a couple of names out of yesteryear in this week's issue: Commodore and Amiga. Wait until you see what's up with those two, after all these years!

It had to happen eventually. It's amazing that the internet has finally taken hold with regard to the political scene. While political activity on the web is not new, it seems that the 2008 elections are taking note of the internet. Web blogs, and sites like MySpace and YouTube are becoming online "headquarters" for the candidates. Personally, I'm not sure how beneficial these will be since they are geared more toward the younger crowd, although the college crowd will be a factor. We'll just have to see what kind influence this will bring to the political scene.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
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Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, we've gone a full week without a major happening, and I've got to tell you... it's a nice feeling.

On the small scale, we did have a glitch with our website, but luckily

it was corrected before it became a major problem. We recently switched domain name registrars, and are preparing to switch servers. There are always little things that pop up that you don't expect, and so far it hasn't been too much of a hassle. I guess the biggest hassle has been to get me to actually do the switching.

On the computer front, there's the OLPC (One Laptop Per Child) laptop, brainchild of the MIT Media Lab, which was supposed to be available to governments for approximately one hundred dollars a piece... eventually. The original plan had been to begin selling the low-powered laptops at somewhere between \$120 and \$140 dollars, with mass production a year to eighteen months down the road dropping the cost to a hundred. The latest news is that the starting price will be somewhere in the neighborhood of \$175.00.

Now, anyone who was active in the Atari world ten to fifteen years ago will remember a similar philosophy. The "just drop the price" mantra that we all became familiar with instead of real innovation just doesn't work in the long run. It may hype stock prices for a little while and allow major stock holders to 'cash out' before getting skunked, but the community was deprived of what they deserved... a company that was worthy of the trust (and currency) they placed in it.

I can't help thinking, though, that providing low cost mobile computers to countries to distribute to their children (and the laptops ARE intended for children) is a bit like the stories we've heard before about giving food assistance to governments to distribute to their needy. How many times did we see news stories about the privileged few within the government either keeping the stuff for themselves or selling it on the black market? Can this laptop be any different? How many poor families will sell these things to pay for food?

The other thing I'm wondering about is the wisdom of giving laptops to children who very probably have other, more pressing needs. Might it not be akin to giving dessert to a child who has not had dinner? And what exactly is the aim here? Does anyone really think that a child from Darfur is going to land a job at Goldman Sachs because she had the benefit of a laptop in her no-running-water village? Or maybe scads of young graduates from the Amazon basin will land positions as system analysts at AT&T. No, I firmly believe that what would be of the most benefit is education and experience that makes sense in their world.

My family is deeply involved in the teaching profession, and I'm proud to say that not a single one of them is using teaching as a stepping stone toward an administration job. Teaching was/is their goal. As a matter of fact, until I discovered what the average teacher's salary was at that time, I had considered teaching.

While I'm not strictly a "Readin' Writin' and 'Rythmatic" kind of guy, I firmly believe that the basics are paramount. The basics are the foundation of everything you can name. Without them, the reasons that things are the way they are get lost. Even here in this country, we're turning out students these days who cannot tell you how many planets there are in the solar system, can't add double-digit numbers without a calculator, or compose even elementary sentences with correct grammar.

Instead of staying true to the basics, going back to square one and following the path that had been set before us for decades, and even centuries, we've decided that memorizing answers for a test is good enough, instead of instilling students with the ability to actually

understand the 'how' and the 'why' to give them the ability to understand. For the most part, the status quo is to teach students to pass a test as opposed to teaching them how to learn. Instead of going back to what has worked in the past, we've decided that we know better and that all we need to do is make more rules, more excuses, and change the meanings of the words 'teach', 'learn' and almost as importantly, 'fund'.

The computer, or more precisely, the use of computers in teaching, is another facet of this. There very probably isn't anyone around these days who doubts how important a tool the computer has become. Even without the Internet, computers are fantastic time-savers. But the ease they provide is a double-edged sword. Like an ambulatory person constantly using a wheelchair, 'muscles' will soon begin to atrophy. The old phrase, "If you don't use it you're going to lose it" is as true for gray matter as it is for muscle.

In my opinion, for children in general, and children in developing countries in particular, spending the \$175.00 on books, paper, pencils and educators would be a better investment. And there isn't much of a black market for 'See Dick Run' books, spiral notebooks and good old #2's.

Okay, enough of that. Let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Guillaume Tello asks about a jumper on the TT RAM board:

"Can someone confirm that jumper W105 on the TT Ram board is used to set Burst Mode? And is it: 3-2 Burst Mode? And: 2-1 Non Burst mode?

If so, my TT Ram was sold to me ten years ago in Non Burst mode! Can I change the setting without any problem? I have a TT with CPU on the motherboard, and I have a CaTTamaran accelerator."

Roger Burrows tells Guillaume:

"Yes [That's the right jumper]...

Yes [3-2 is burst mode and 2-1 is non-burst], with the pins numbered from the right when looking at the W105 the right way up (i.e. pins are 3-2-1)...

The SIMMs have to be nybble-mode DRAMs. There was a good explanation of all this by Howard Chu many years back - I have the article printed out, but I'm not sure if it's still online. The conclusion was that, although burst mode can transfer 4 longwords in 7 clock cycles (compared with 12 clock cycles in non-burst mode), the 68030 burst implementation has very limited impact on performance. This is because:

- . the 68030 only performs burst accesses when filling its instruction cache; data fetches always use non-burst mode

- . most of the time, needed instructions are already in the cache

By the way, I checked two TTRAM boards, and neither had "burst mode" set. I suspect that burst mode TTRAM boards are pretty rare ..."

Lonny Pursell chimes in and tells Roger:

"I think you are correct [about burst mode on TTRAM boards being rare]. The only one I ever saw working was a 3rd party board. Never seen an Atari made one set that way myself that didn't come up all XXXX's.

This might help.

http://dev-docs.atariforge.org/files/TT030_Fast_RAM_3-25-1991.pdf

I had such a board once that was fussy about the sims. The sims have to have allow nibble mode access or something, I forget exactly. So then it would not work with burst enabled. It would boot with a row of XXXX's on the fast ram test. All you can do is try it I think."

Ben from Bravo Sierra Computers asks about VGA adapters for the Atari:

"Does this [Atari VGA adapter] exist?"

Greg Goodwin tells Ben:

"Most certainly.

ST High -> VGA is a simple matter of making a cable. Here is the (edited) copy of a post I made about four years ago:

... ST High is NEARLY the same as monochrome VGA, so you can get a simple adapter cable and any VGA monitor that can handle multiple resolutions. Pretty much any one I've seen made after 1998 will be able to display it. You won't get STLow or STMed though.
STHigh : 35.7 KHz, 72 Hz refresh, 1.0V max
Standard VGA: 31.5 KHz, 60 Hz refresh, 0.7V max

Here's what I found on the web (note, I haven't tried this myself):

ST to VGA (ST High)

ST pin number		VGA pin number
9 (H Sync)	-----	13 (H Sync)
12 (V Sync)	-----	14 (V Sync)
13 (GND)	-----	10 (GND)

10 (Mono Out) needs connecting to VGA pins 1, 2 and 3. If your monitor doesn't have a setting to handle a 1 V signal (mine can switch between 1 V and 0.7 V) you should use a 75 Ohm resistor for each of the R, G, B signals connected to MONO OUT -- however, most monitors I've seen don't get harmed by a 1 V signal (they're just a bit bright), so if the monitor is relatively inexpensive I would consider the last step optional.

The following pins also need connecting together on the VGA connector:

4? (Monitor ID Bit 2 ?) -- This pin may or may not be needed,
depending on the monitor.
6 (Red GND)
7 (Green GND)
8 (Blue GND)
10 (GND)
11 (GND)

The following pins also need connecting together on the ST connector:

4 (Mono Detect)
13 (GND)

As for VGA Low or Medium, European users can use the SCART connector
(so I'm told). We Americans have three choices:

- 1) Use the TV (composite) output to a computer or monitor that can handle a TV signal. (This is usually a poor quality solution for ST Med, but is OK for ST Low.)
- 2) Use a scan doubler. (These are generally available at electronics stores in the video games section. Look for something that is designed to let you play your PS2 or GameCube on a VGA monitor. (This works great for ST Low and OK for ST Med.)
- 3) Use a monitor that can natively handle the ST's resolutions. Unfortunately, the only ones I know of that have been made in the last fifteen years are very expensive, as they are made primarily as replacements for displays of large-scale equipment (power plants and the like).

One interesting solution is to use a LCD TV/Monitor. Many of these have a composite in (good for ST Low) and a VGA in (good for ST High). Of course, should you go that route, a native resolution of 640x480 or 1280 x 960 is suggested to avoid rescaling issues. I've seen several TVs that would fill the bill, but you'd have to create a cable with a toggle to change resolutions (or use the old "Monitor Master" device."

'Dave' posts that he's...

"Pretty sure the hard disk in my TT is dead as a Dodo.

What options have I got to replace this? The one inside it is a Quantum Discache from 1988, I'm not even sure of the capacity.

The SCSI connector on the back has 50 pins.

Can I just pick any 50 pin SCSI drive from Ebay and plug it in?

Also I have a couple of external 18gb HDs in rather solid cases made by a company called "Blue Disc" They are the 68pin types with a plug in terminator. If I just pull the dead HD from the TT what else would I need to use in order for this to become the main HD? Would I need to set some sort of termination on the TT itself?

I have HDDriver 8.18 for the setup/partition."

Jean-Luc Ceccoli tells Dave:

"That [hard drives dying] happens sometimes.

Almost every 50 pin SCSI HD should work but... I have a Seagate Barracuda KLGSPR drive that I never could manage to make work on my TT, while it did on my Falcon.

You need a 50 pin to 68 pin converter - give me a few days, and I give you the exact ref of the part.

I'm currently using an IBM Ultrastar DCHS04U drive, which is 68 pins single ended fast/wide with such an item, and it works fine. Note however, that under plain TOS you will only be able to use the 12 first GBs (512x24, assumed that you don't use any other drive such as CD), so there will be 6 GBs lost."

Dave tells Jean-Luc:

"I've found a SCSI cable which has the (Centronics?) 50 pin connector on one end for the TT and 68pin (Wide?) connector on the other end.

Is it just me or are all the different SCSI connectors confusing?

In another thread regarding a ZIP question Uwe mentioned 8 & 16bit bus... Argh!!!!

Only MiNT or MagiC! will let you use the whole available space."

Dave now asks about booting from an external drive:

"Is it possible to setup a SCSI ZIP drive as the C: drive and boot from it on a TT or Falcon?"

Derryck Croker pulls a 'Biden' and replies:

"Yes."

Dave tells Derryck:

"[I] Just tried this with a 100mb ZIP and a TT. I partitioned the ZIP and formatted it, I then installed HDDRIVER.SYS into the root of C: (The ZIP), I checked that the boot drive was set to C: and then rebooted without a floppy in A:

Message reads "No partitions found".

Even running HDRUTIL.APP from the A: drive now cannot find the C: partition.

Is the procedure for using a ZIP as the C: drive exactly the same as it is for a normal HD?"

Derryck tells Dave:

"I can't recall if you can set all available ID numbers on the ZIP drives. If you can't set 0 for it, have you enabled its ID in HDDDriver?"

Re your termination question, the ZIP drives have a switchable termination."

Dr. Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver, tells Derryck:

"I think only 5 and 6 are supported. In this case, just as you say, HDDRIVER must be configured accordingly, e.g. by using the "Auto Configuration" option."

Dave tells Uwe:

"[The] Cable is ok and the ZIP is terminated. I've not changed any termination on the TT itself, mostly because I don't know how to.

Ok so if I boot from the ZIP drive can I then switch ZIP disks once the system has booted? At this stage I'm just using TOS."

Uwe adds:

"You can do so as long as there are no applications that expect the same data to be present on the boot drive that were present when booting. Accessories, in particular, might expect that, but I have no idea if any accessory actually does. All in all it is basically the same like with any other (non-bootable) partition: Applications should complain if they are missing something they expect to find."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Video Game Newcomers Eye More Emotional Range

Jenova Chen and Kellee Santiago, two of video gaming's hottest independent developers, are tapping new emotions with their games in a bid to give their industry the range to rival Hollywood films.

The duo is off to a strong start. They sold their student game "f10w" - a soothing title where players guide an aquatic creature as it eats and evolves to the beat of ethereal background music - to console giant Sony Corp., which also has the first crack at their next two projects.

"Right now video games are focused on releasing anger and stress...that's really limited. If you want a deeper understanding of life, you aren't going to get it from a video game," said Chen, 25.

He and Santiago, 28, arrived on the scene in time to ride a wave of technological change that's made it easier for hobbyists to create games and share them via the Web.

Not long ago, "it was more prohibitive to make a game than a film," said Jamil Moledina, the executive director of the Game Developers Conference, a trade event.

He noted that independent game makers now have an opportunity to leave their mark without being part of a \$20 million team.

Moledina described "f10w" as engrossing and calming and said the game is an example of how the video game business is expanding beyond the genres of shooters, racers and puzzle games.

"They are part of a growing breed of independent developers who are challenging what games are supposed to look like," Moledina said.

The industry's biggest players are supporting such efforts, giving independents a way to showcase their work.

Sony offers "f10w" on the PlayStation 3's new online service, which rivals Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox Live gaming platform and Valve's Steam online download service.

While "f10w" and its predecessor "Cloud" are focused on the Zen end of the emotional spectrum, Chen thinks games should probe the light and dark sides of human emotion.

Knocking the widely held, but scientifically unproven, theory that violent games create violent children, Chen said games give players an emotional outlet not available in day-to-day life by letting them laugh, experience an adrenaline rush, or work out aggressive and violent feelings.

Earlier this year, Chen's team and other finalists pulled out of the Slamdance Guerrilla Gamemaker Competition to protest organizers' decision to cut "Super Columbine Massacre Role Playing Game" from the list of finalists.

Players of that downloadable game, which uses simple graphics reminiscent of the early arcade era, adopt the roles of the teens who killed 13

people and then themselves at Columbine High School nearly eight years to the day of this week's shooting rampage at Virginia Tech.

Chen said the game is "disturbing," but wondered whether it would have faced the same hurdles if it had been a film.

"It's like a new style of documentary," he added.

Danny Ledonne, creator of "Super Columbine Massacre," predicted that artists will tackle the Virginia shootings in a variety of ways.

"I do not believe the medium of interactive electronic media should be excluded from exploring the sorrows and challenges of the human experience," Ledonne wrote on his site.

Sony's "Father of PlayStation" To Step Down

The architect of Sony Corp.'s PlayStation, Ken Kutaragi, will step down on June 19, at a time when the Japanese company is fighting to reassert its lead in the video game market.

Known as the "Father of PlayStation," Kutaragi, 56, took a lead role in the invention of the Sony game console in 1994 and the PlayStation 2 in 2000. Known as a company black sheep, he bucked consensus to turn video games into a cash cow, but lately has seen his status diminish.

Sony has sold more than 200 million units of these consoles globally, though the PlayStation 3 has made a weaker-than-expected showing against Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360 and Nintendo Co. Ltd.'s Wii console since its launch last year in the \$30 billion video game market.

Nintendo, which entered the three-way console race in the underdog position, on Thursday stunned investors with a nearly eight-fold rise in quarterly operating profit and forecast stronger than expected growth for the year.

Kutaragi will retire as chief executive of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc., known as SCE, and become honorary chairman. He will also act as a senior technology adviser to parent Sony Corp., the company said on Thursday.

Kazuo Hirai, the division's current president and chief operating officer, has been promoted to group chief executive in charge of the PlayStation business.

Analysts said Hirai has big shoes to fill.

"Mr. Kutaragi is a legend in the gaming industry. He beat entrenched competitors who had been in the business for years, like Nintendo and Sega," said Jupiter Research analyst Michael Gartenberg. "He dominated two generations of console cycles, which was unheard of in the industry."

"It's Mr. Hirai now who is going to be on the hot seat and who is going to have to deliver PS3 success," Gartenberg said.

Kutaragi's exit is seen as the end of an era for Sony, the once high-flying electronics and entertainment conglomerate that has already

Ah, Commodore 64, Atari ST, ZX Spectrum, Amiga 500. We loved you all so much, where did it all go wrong? Chronic mismanagement and lack of R&D probably, but now we have one of them back! Commodore's new gaming PCs are finally on sale. Currently available is the seriously powerful quad-core XX, with up to a terabyte of hard disk space, a maximum 4GB RAM and dual Nvidia GeForce 8800 GTX 768MB graphics cards. And you

thought your PS3 was well specced. Just below that is the similarly quad-core GX, which also comes with up to a terabyte of hard disk, a maximum 2GB RAM and space for two Nvidia GeForce 8800 GTS 640MB graphics cards. Both can also be ordered with Blu-ray burners and multiple monitors for quite simply the ultimate PC gaming and media rig. Everything can be customised, of course, which includes the case. Either go for plain black with recessed chicken-head logo or any one of 100 modded 'C-kins' designs. Oh, and for a bit of old school reminiscing you'll find a C64 emulator and 50 games pre-loaded. Slightly less budget blowing are the G and GS models. They'll only be available in retail stores. Look out for more details on those next month. Essentials - Commodore G, GS, GX, XXPrice: £TBA, £TBA, £1760, £2900 On sale: Now (May for G and GS)Contact: www.commodoregaming.com

Nintendo Wii To Get Kiiboard?

Sure, we love our Wii remotes and nunchuks, but what we really want is to speed up our Wii web browsing with a keyboard. And it looks like our prayers could be answered, with a special keyboard (or Wiiboard if you will) possibly on the way. US games mag Game Informer has a snippet buried away in the news in briefs declaring that Ninty's developers are 'considering adding a keyboard peripheral to the system in order to make surfing online easier.' It makes perfect sense to use. Now that Wii's Internet Channel is fully up and running, the only thing holding it back is the lack of a proper QWERTY slab to type on. It wouldn't be the first such Nintendo device either, the Gamecube had a couple of keyboards made for it, including the Sammy controller. Adding further fuel to the fire is Logitech's announcement last week that it's working with Mario and co. to bring new peripherals to the Wii. Bluetooth-enabled with subtle backlighting please, Logitech. Essentials Nintendo WiiPrice: £180 On sale: Now Contact: www.nintendo.co.uk

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A-ONE's Headline News  
The Latest in Computer Technology News  
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

#### Presidential Debates Set for Cyberspace

The 2008 presidential contenders may soon be slugging it out in cyberspace, with pioneering online-only debates being planned for early next fall, a new media partnership says.

The political blog Huffington Post, online portal Yahoo and Slate Magazine will host the debates - one for Democratic candidates, one for Republicans - sometime after Labor Day, with PBS host Charlie Rose serving as moderator, the sponsors planned to announce Monday.

Voters will be invited to submit questions, and can blog in real time to

share their opinions on the candidates' answers.

Arianna Huffington, founder of the Huffington Post, said the idea for online debates was hatched earlier this year at the World Economic Forum in Davos, which bloggers and citizen journalists had been invited to cover.

"It was clear to me, the 2008 campaign was going to be dominated by what's happening on line - new technologies, new media like never before," Huffington said. She then contacted Rose and Slate editor Jacob Weisberg to form a partnership to produce the forums.

Yahoo Inc.-, the largest provider of online news, will host the debates and provide the technological expertise to produce them.

Candidates will be able to participate from far-flung locations, speaking and interacting with one another before separate video cameras. The video will also appear on the Slate and Huffington Post Web sites.

Major news organizations have already harnessed Internet technology for debates, often Webcasting them and televising them at once. But Web-only debates will be substantively different than televised debates that appear online, participants in the partnership said.

Scott Moore, director of Yahoo's news and information service, compared the debates to the first televised forums between Democrat John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon in 1960.

Historians believe voters who watched the debate believed Kennedy was the winner, while voters who listened on the radio thought Nixon had won.

It's a really significant, historic opportunity for the candidates to test their debate skills in a brand new format," Moore said.

Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean has agreed to introduce the Democratic debate, Huffington said. She said the campaigns had all been contacted about the idea and most had indicated an interest in participating.

#### Another Domain Name, '.biz,' Raises Fees

Another week, another price increase in Internet addresses.

This time, it's ".biz" whose fees are going up.

In recent weeks, operators of ".com," ".net," ".org" and ".info" have announced increases beginning in mid-October in the wholesale prices for domain names, what the operators collect from the companies that sell names on their behalf. Such charges are generally incorporated in the prices companies, groups and individuals pay to register names, and they apply to new registrations, transfers and renewals.

Many of the announced hikes became possible when the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, the Internet's key oversight agency, agreed to new contract terms in December, permitting an annual hike of up to 10 percent a year upon six months' notice.

NeuStar Inc., the operator of ".biz," said it would raise fees 7 percent

to \$6.42, starting Oct. 19.

In a letter to ICANN, NeuStar said the company was "taking this action to align .BIZ domain prices more closely with those of competing global TLDs," or domain names.

With about 1.7 million names registered, the ".biz" suffix is the world's 10th most popular domain name and was one of seven ICANN approved in 2000 in the first major expansion of Internet addresses since the system was created in the 1980s.

#### New Amigas On the Way, Company Says

Amiga Inc. said this week that the first Amiga computers since the 1990s are "on its way".

Virtually nothing was released as far as the new designs were concerned, other than the PCs will be based on the PowerPC architecture and hit two price points with two different machines: one selling for \$500, and the other for \$1,500.

The new hardware was announced after "months of designs and negotiations" between Amiga and its software partner, ACK Software Controls.

Reader Olid Wread remembers Amiga.

"I have been working on these designs with Amiga for almost 12 months and have been able to create two new designs that will fully support the needs and desires of today's Amiga user, while opening the doors for new users, said Adam Kowalczyk, president of ACK Software Controls, Inc., in a statement.

Amiga will be working with retailers in the coming weeks to finalize launch plans, the company said.

Later acknowledged as an icon of the computer era, the Amiga was launched in 1982 as part of Commodore. The company went bankrupt in 1994 and licensed the name to Eyetech, a U.K. developer.

#### '\$100 Laptop' To Cost \$175

The founder of the ambitious "\$100 laptop" project, which plans to give inexpensive computers to schoolchildren in developing countries, revealed Thursday that the machine for now costs \$175, and it will be able to run Windows in addition to its homegrown, open-source interface.

Nicholas Negroponte, the former director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab who now heads the nonprofit One Laptop Per Child project, updated analysts and journalists on where the effort stands, saying "we are perhaps at the most critical stage of OLPC's life."

That's partly because at least seven nations have expressed interest in being in the initial wave to buy the little green-and-white "XO" computers Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, Pakistan, Thailand, Nigeria and Libya but it

remains unclear which ones will be first to pony up the cash. The project needs orders for 3 million machines so its manufacturing and distribution effort can get rolling.

The ever-optimistic Negroponte didn't sound worried, however: He expects mass production to begin by October, and he said many other countries, including Peru and Russia, have been inquiring about taking part.

The XO machines will be made by Quanta Computer Inc., the world's leading manufacturer of portable computers. Quanta agreed to take a profit of about \$3 per machine, less than what it gets from mainstream PC companies, Negroponte said.

Even so, the machine - which boasts extremely low electricity consumption, a pulley for hand-generated power, built-in wireless networking and a screen with indoor and outdoor reading modes - now costs \$175. The One Laptop project takes an additional \$1 to fund its distribution efforts.

Negroponte's team has always stressed that \$100 was a long-term target for the machines, but recently publicized figures had put it in the \$150 range. Negroponte says the cost should drop about 25 percent per year as the project unfolds. He added that Citigroup Inc.'s Citibank division has agreed to facilitate a payment system on a pro bono basis; Citibank will float payments to Quanta and other laptop suppliers, and governments will repay the bank.

Even at \$175, the computers upend the standard economics in the PC industry. A huge reason has been XO's use of the free, open-source Linux operating system, tweaked for this project with the help of one of its sponsors, Red Hat Inc.

The result is that XO's software is highly original, in hopes of making the computer useful as a collaborative tool and intuitive for children who have never before encountered a computer. There are no windows or folders, but rather an interface heavily reliant on pictographic icons.

However, Negroponte disclosed that XO's developers have been working with Microsoft Corp. so a version of Windows can run on the machines as well. It could be the \$3 software package that Microsoft announced last week for governments that subsidize student computers. It includes Windows XP Starter Edition and some of Microsoft's "productivity" software.

Word of Microsoft's involvement was somewhat striking given that the software company and its closest corporate partner, Intel Corp., have questioned whether the One Laptop Per Child's computers will do much to stimulate educational gains. Bill Gates once denigrated the machine as not being a "decent computer." And Intel is pushing its own inexpensive computer for developing countries, the \$400 Classmate PC.

The ever-optimistic Negroponte turned those criticisms around on Thursday, arguing that Microsoft wouldn't have bothered with its \$3 international software package and Intel wouldn't be pushing Classmate unless they had something to fear from One Laptop Per Child's innovations.

Whether the XO machines might someday land in U.S. schools has been an open question. Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney announced at one point that he wanted to buy the machines for students in his state. Some time later, Negroponte said Thursday, One Laptop Per Child decided not to work with American schools because "we've designed something for a totally different situation" - meaning kids in poor countries.

Now, he added, that might change, since 19 state governors have shown interest. One of them was then-Florida Gov. Jeb Bush. When Bush first e-mailed and casually signed "Jeb," Negroponte needed to ask his brother, former national intelligence director John Negroponte, whether the query was legitimate.

### U.S. Schools May Join Inexpensive Laptop Project

A project that aims to deliver low-priced laptops with string pulleys to the world's poorest children may have a new market: U.S. schools.

The nonprofit "One Laptop per Child" project said on Thursday it might sell versions of its kid-friendly laptops in the United States, reversing its previous position of only distributing them to the poorest nations.

"We can't ignore the United States. ... We are looking at it very seriously," Nicholas Negroponte, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology academic who founded the project, told analysts and reporters.

Once known as the \$100 laptop, the lime-green-and-white devices are inching up in price. In February, the project estimated said they would sell for \$150 each. Negroponte now puts their price tag at \$176 apiece.

They would go at a higher price to U.S. schools, he said, because more resources are invested in American education than in developing nations, even in the poorest U.S. regions.

The laptop features a string pulley to charge its battery, a keyboard that switches between languages, a digital video camera, wireless connectivity and Linux open-source operating software tailored for remote regions.

The display switches from color to black and white for viewing in direct sunlight - a feature unavailable in laptops at least 10 times more expensive.

It requires just two watts of power compared to the typical laptop's 30 to 40 watts, and does away with hard drives, relying instead on flash memory and four USB ports to add memory devices. A minute of yanking on its pulley generates 10 minutes of electricity.

Negroponte said U.S. schools could receive the laptops by the end of the year in response to interest from 19 governors.

Stephen O'Grady, a software analyst with RedMonk LLC, said millions of the devices, which are built by Taiwan's Quanta Computer Inc., could be sold in the United States.

"There are still lots of underprivileged kids here who don't have access. So there is definitely a market for a very low-priced machine," he said.

Although many applaud the project's attempt to bridge the world's digital divide, some predict it will be a financial burden on countries that can least afford it with no guarantee of success.

Others say the money would be better spent on food, medicine, libraries and schools.



Wayan Vota, whose blog (<http://olpcnews.com/>) monitors the project, estimates the cost of providing one laptop per every Nigerian child equals 73 percent of the African country's entire government budget.

Walter Bender, the group's president of software and content, said tests mostly begun in February in Brazil, Nigeria, Argentina, Uruguay, Pakistan, Thailand, Libya and other countries were largely successful.

The laptops will enter mass production in September if the One Laptop Per Child Foundation that runs the project receives orders for at least 3 million devices, Negroponte said.

Formal orders begin in May but Negroponte said he thinks he has 2.5 million so far. The project will be delayed if he doesn't reach 3 million.

Children in the developing world, Bender added, will receive accounts with Google Inc.'s free e-mail service to store journals, videos, photos, composed music and other school projects. Already, educators are tapping into the popular YouTube Internet video service.

"Teachers in Nigeria can look at what teachers in Brazil are doing," he said.

#### ID Theft Task Force Wants Stronger Laws

The U.S. government plans to establish a national identity theft law enforcement center and create a multiyear public education campaign about the dangers of ID theft, as part of a series of recommendations released by a task force Monday.

The President's Identity Theft Task Force, created by George Bush in May 2006, also called for national data protection standards for private companies that collect and sell personal information, as well as a national law requiring companies to tell customers when their personal data has been compromised.

Federal agencies should stop the unnecessary use of Social Security numbers, and the federal government should step up its efforts to educate agencies about data security best practices and regulations in place, the task force recommended.

ID theft is a "personal invasion, done in secret, that can rob innocent men and women of their good names," U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales said at a press conference. Gonzales, co-chairman of the task force, called ID theft a national security issue.

The task force recommendations target both private companies and federal agencies. Recent news reports of data breaches at federal agencies are "problematic," Gonzales said.

Congress debated several data breach notification bills but failed to pass them during its last session. Five data breach notification bills have been introduced this year.

The task force report, available at the new Web site [IDtheft.gov](http://IDtheft.gov), includes 31 recommendations.

A comprehensive approach is needed to combat ID theft, said Deborah Platt Majoras, chairwoman of the U.S. Federal Trade Commission and co-chairwoman of the ID theft task force.

"It is a blight on America's privacy and security landscape," she said. "It erodes a critical element of our economy - trust in a person's good name and credit."

In addition to recommendations targeting federal agencies and private companies, the task force report targets criminals. The report focuses on the "entire life cycle" of ID theft, Majoras said.

The report calls on U.S. attorney's offices to designate a prosecutor who will focus on ID theft, and it recommends tougher laws for ID theft, including those targeting spyware makers and keystroke loggers. The U.S. should also create new sentencing guidelines that make it easier for judges to increase sentences for ID thieves who steal multiple identities, the report said.

Some of the task force recommendations have already been implemented, and others should be implemented within the next year, Gonzales said. The task force in September made several interim recommendations, including the creation of nationally accepted police reports that victims could fill out online, and a change in U.S. law that would require those convicted of such crimes to pay victims for the time used to clear up identity problems.

#### Lawsuit Targets 'Spam Harvesters'

An anti-spam organization filed a federal lawsuit Thursday targeting so-called spam harvesters, who facilitate the mass distribution of junk e-mail by trolling the Internet and collecting millions of e-mail addresses.

The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in Alexandria by a Utah company called Unspam Technologies Inc. The company runs a Web site called Project Honey Pot dedicated to tracking spam harvesters worldwide.

Project Honey Pot has collected thousands of Internet addresses that it has linked to spam harvesters, but it so far has been unable to link those addresses to an actual person.

The lawsuit names a variety of John Does as defendants, and the plaintiffs hope that the legal process will allow them to track the actual people who are harvesting the e-mail addresses, said lead attorney Jon Praed with the Arlington-based Internet Law Group.

Collecting e-mail addresses is not by itself illegal, but Praed said the plaintiffs will be able to link the harvesting to spam e-mails, which are illegal under federal and state laws. Those laws allow individuals who receive unwanted spam to seek civil damages.

Praed said legitimate businesses are afraid to post e-mail addresses on their Web sites for fear that automated Web crawlers will find the addresses, record them and sell them to spammers who will inundate them with junk e-mail.

Praed said the lawsuit will "focus on the worst of the worst," using information that Project Honey Pot has already collected and analyzed.

"We have a lot of data, a lot of clusters that have emerged" from all over the world. The legal discovery process will allow them to track that data to the actual harvesters, he said.

### Malware Writers Target Google AdWords

Google has removed paid advertisements that link to 20 search terms online criminals hijacked to steal the personal identities of people searching the Internet. Google canceled the ads on Tuesday, but security researchers said there might be additional links that need to be removed.

Exploit Prevention Labs discovered the scheme on April 10 when a user of the company's link-scanning software ran a Google search on the phrase "how to start a business." The top-ranked sponsored search listing appeared to be from AllBusiness.com, a legitimate business, yet the hyperlink actually led to a site that attempted to install a password-stealing keylogger on the user's PC.

"The post-logger is specifically targeting about 100 banks from around the world, by injecting extra HTML into those banks' response pages, to try to coax extra information out of the victim," Roger Thompson, CTO for Exploit Prevention Labs, wrote in his blog. Thompson added that this "equal-opportunity logger" happily logs all user IDs and passwords for any Web page.

The bogus links also appeared to take users to sites such as the Better Business Bureau and Cars.com, but actually were stemming from a site called SmartTrack.org, according to Exploit Prevention Labs.

Of course, bogus AdWords accounts aren't an everyday tactic, but according to Michael Sutton, a security evangelist with SPI Dynamics and former VeriSign iDefense lab director, the approach isn't new. Attackers are increasingly targeting client-side vulnerabilities as end users are generally less likely to be patched against known vulnerabilities and are less likely to be able to spot fraud, he explained.

"Client-side attacks, however, always require some form of social engineering; the attacker must convince the victim to perform some action, such as visit a Web page," Sutton noted. "This is typically done by sending spam e-mail to thousands of people. While most will ignore the message, a handful will fall for the scam."

Sutton said an alternate and likely more effective approach involves leveraging a Web site that already receives high volumes of traffic. By using Google AdWords to generate traffic, he explained, the attackers in this scenario leveraged one of the most powerful traffic generators on the Internet.

"Most criminals seem to shy away from such an approach, as it requires them to pay a nominal fee for the traffic generated; but it's a powerful tool for serious criminals," Sutton said, recalling a situation that occurred last year in which an attacker put up paid banner ads on MySpace. The ads turned out to be images that used a popular Windows file vulnerability to install spyware on machines with vulnerable Web browsers.

The moral of the Google AdWords hack story: "Attackers are realizing that in business, you need to spend money to make money. It's up to the advertisers to filter such content and they're going to need to raise the bar," Sutton concluded. "Assuming that a paid service will deter criminals is simply not enough."

#### Four Plead Guilty in Auction Software Piracy Scheme

Four men have pleaded guilty in U.S. court in Wisconsin to selling copyright software on eBay.com, the U.S. Department of Justice announced Thursday.

Pleading guilty in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin were Eric Neil Barber of Manila, Arkansas; Phillip Buchanan of Hampton, Georgia; Wendell Jay Davis of Las Vegas; and Craig J. Svetska, of West Chicago, Illinois, the DOJ said.

The four sold counterfeit Rockwell Automation Inc. software, with a retail value of more than US\$19.1 million through eBay Inc., the DOJ said. The defendants each face up to five years in prison and a fine of \$250,000.

Three other defendants have also received felony convictions in the case.

Rockwell Automation produces specialized factory management software. Most of the software sold by these defendants on eBay had retail prices ranging from about \$900 to \$11,325.

Barber acknowledged that he initiated 217 eBay auctions for Rockwell Automation software between April 2003 and August 2004, the DOJ said. Barber's profit was about \$32,500, while the retail value of the software was more than \$1.4 million.

Between January and August 2004, Buchanan offered 67 auctions, generating a profit of about \$13,100, the DOJ said. The retail value of the software was more than \$2 million.

Davis offered auctions for 53 pieces of Rockwell software between February 2003 and August 2004. He made about \$17,000 on software with a retail value of nearly \$8 million, the DOJ said.

Svetska initiated 376 auctions between June and August 2004, the DOJ said. He made a profit of about \$59,700 on software with a retail value of more than \$7.6 million.

In addition to the Wisconsin pleas, there have been two convictions in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan and another in the Southern District of Indiana. The combined retail value of the counterfeit software in all seven cases is about \$25 million, the DOJ said.

#### U.S. Vulnerable To Major Cyberattacks

The U.S. government needs to take action now to avoid crippling

cyberattacks that could shut down major communications systems nationwide, a group of cybersecurity experts told U.S. lawmakers Wednesday.

"We are a nation unprepared to properly defend ourselves and recover from a strategic cyberattack," said O. Sami Saydjari, president of Professionals for Cyber Defense and CEO of Cyber Defense Agency, speaking before the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science and Technology. "Inaction isn't an option."

Saydjari and other experts urged the U.S. Congress to take several steps to improve the nation's cybersecurity, work that could be begun with an investment of \$500 million.

The U.S. has been lucky so far to avoid a major attack, added Daniel Geer Jr., principal owner of Geer Risk Services. "I don't think we can go much farther and say that, 'I didn't know it had a flaw,' is any kind of defense," he said. "Software licenses, to the last one of them, have that built into them."

Geer recommended that the government develop better security metrics and recruit and train cybersecurity experts.

The U.S. has had some near-misses, he said. In September 2001, a week after the 9/11 attacks, hackers could have used the Nimda worm to shut down the 911 emergency dialing system in the U.S., causing major public panic, he said.

"The nation's cybersecurity challenges are profound and not easily addressed," Geer said. "Wishful thinking, whether explicit or implicit, intentional or delusional, will allow the problem to get bigger."

Not all witnesses agreed with Geer and Saydjari that a crippling attack was possible. While attackers could knock out pieces of communications networks, the possibility of a widespread outage may be overstated, said James Lewis, director of the Technology and Public Policy Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

It's difficult to knock out the communications systems in even small countries, he said. "A very big country turns out to be hard to derail," Lewis added.

Still, Lewis acknowledged that the U.S. has cybersecurity problems, particularly defending against espionage. "Cybersecurity is at this time primarily a spy story," he said. "Foreign intelligence agencies must weep with joy when they contemplate U.S. government networks."

The U.S. government has placed sensitive data on unsecured networks, Lewis said, repeating criticisms from a cybersecurity hearing before the committee last week. "The last 20 years have seen an unparalleled looting of U.S. government databases," he added.

A small group of hackers couldn't pull off a major cyberattack, Saydjari said. But an organization with three years to plan and \$500 million to spend could make it happen, he said. Many nations and major terrorist organizations have those resources, he added.

Last week's hearing on cyberattacks at the U.S. departments of Commerce and State was "eye-opening," said Representative James Langevin, a Rhode Island Democrat and subcommittee chairman. "We learned that our federal

systems and privately owned critical infrastructure are all extremely vulnerable to hacking," he said. "We learned that the federal government has little situational awareness of what is going on inside our systems."

## \$10,000 Mac Hack Affects Windows Too

The bug that helped security researcher Dino Dai Zovi claim a \$10,000 prize at last week's CanSecWest security conference affects Windows systems too.

That's because the flaw that Dai Zovi exploited actually lies in the way Apple's QuickTime Media Player works with the Java programming language, according to Terri Forslof, manager of security response at 3Com's TippingPoint division, which put up the \$10,000 prize. QuickTime runs on both Windows and the Mac.

When first reported last week, Dai Zovi's bug was thought to lie in Apple's Safari browser, a standard component of Mac OS X. But users of Firefox - which supports QuickTime on both Windows and the Mac - are also at risk, Forslof said Tuesday.

In terms of seriousness, the bug is comparable to the animated cursor vulnerability that was recently patched in Windows, Forslof said. The bug "is the equivalent to a 'click and you're owned' vulnerability," she said.

TippingPoint disclosed the flaw to Apple on Monday, but there is still no word on when it will be patched. Because the flaw has not been publicly disclosed, it is not considered to be a significant threat to QuickTime users.

Dai Dovi disclosed the flaw to TippingPoint as part of a contest set up by CanSecWest organizers to see how easy it was to take control of a Mac. "You see a lot of people running OS X saying it's so secure and frankly Microsoft is putting more work into security than Apple has," said Dragos Ruiu, the principal organizer of CanSecWest, speaking at the show in Vancouver last week.

Initially, contestants were invited to try to access one of two Macs through a wireless access point without any programs running. No attackers managed to do so, and so conference organizers allowed participants to try to get in through the browser by sending URLs (uniform resource locators) via e-mail.

Dai Zovi, who lives in New York, sent a URL that exposed the hole. Since the contest was only open to attendees in Vancouver, he sent it to a friend who was at the conference and forwarded it on.

Though CanSecWest's Ruiu said that Apple has been heavy handed in its past dealings with security researchers, Dai Dovi said that has not been his experience. "I have yet to hear anything from Apple besides their standard reply to a vulnerability submission," he said in an e-mail interview. Dai Dovi said he has reported at least eight security vulnerabilities to Apple and has had "nothing but positive interactions" with the company.

British rocker Pete Townshend on Wednesday unveiled an Internet-based software program that will help music fans compose personalized tracks at the click of a button.

The Who guitarist/songwriter said that with a voice recording, a digital image and a rhythm clapped into a microphone, his new "Method" software will create spontaneous digital music and allow anyone to be a composer, and possibly a rock star.

"You can put data in and get a piece of music out. It's as simple as that," said Townshend, a technical wizard who pioneered the use of the synthesizer more than 35 years ago on the classic tunes "Won't Get Fooled Again" and "Baba O'Riley."

The project, which started percolating during his art school days in the 1960s, was developed by mathematician/composer Lawrence Ball and software developer Dave Snowden.

From May 1, users will be able to get free access to the Web site (<http://www.lifehouse-method.com>) for three months, and will be able to compose instrumental tracks that they can e-mail or post on their Web sites. From August 1, it will become a subscription-based service.

Composers such as Townshend and Ball will also take some of the tracks and add instruments and rhythms, to create more complex pieces that could become the basis of future albums.

"It represents a whole new level of rock integration, blending rock and psychedelia with classical and experimental music," Ball said.

Townshend said he hopes the Web site will enable more people to become composers and said it was part of a growing trend towards using the internet to create and distribute music.

He joked that even his girlfriend's dog could inspire music using the software, likening the composing process to sitting for a portrait.

"I as a composer would try to get something out of this dog that would give me the chance to turn the dog into music," he said.

"I might listen to the way it breathes, I might touch it and see how it feels, I might listen to its bark, I might look at the rhythm of his running.

Townshend said he hoped members of the site would share their copyrights.

#### China Aims To Tame Internet and Spread Party Line

Chinese President Hu Jintao on Monday launched a campaign to rid the country's sprawling Internet of "unhealthy" content and make it a springboard for Communist Party doctrine, state television reported.

With Hu presiding, the Communist Party Politburo - its 24-member inner council - discussed cleaning up the Internet, state television reported. The meeting promised to place the often unruly medium more firmly under

propaganda controls.

"Development and administration of Internet culture must stick to the direction of socialist advanced culture, adhere to correct propaganda guidance," said a summary of the meeting read on the news broadcast.

"Internet cultural units must conscientiously take on the responsibility of encouraging development of a system of core socialist values."

The meeting was far from the first time China has sought to rein in the Internet. In January, Hu made a similar call to "purify" it, and there have been many such calls before.

But the announcement indicated that Hu wants ever tighter controls as he braces for a series of political hurdles and seeks to govern a generation of young Chinese for whom Mao Zedong's socialist revolution is a hazy history lesson.

"Consolidate the guiding status of Marxism in the ideological sphere," the party meeting urged, calling for more Marxist education on the Internet.

The Communist Party is preparing for a congress later this year that is set to give Hu another five-year term and open the way for him to choose eventual successors. In 2008, Beijing hosts the Olympic Games, when the party's economic achievements will be on display, along with its political and media controls.

In 2006, China's Internet users grew by 26 million, or 23.4 percent, year on year, to reach 137 million, Chinese authorities have estimated.

That lucrative market has attracted big investors such as Google and Yahoo. They have been criticized by some rights groups for bowing to China's censors.

The one-party government already wields a vast system of filters and censorship that blocks the majority of users from sites offering uncensored opinion and news. But even in China, news of official misdeeds and dissident opinion has been able to travel fast through online bulletin boards and blogs.

Authorities have also launched repeated crackdowns on pornography and salacious content. The latest campaign against porn and "rumor-spreading" was announced earlier this month.

The meeting also announced that schools and sports groups would be encouraged to use healthy competition as a way to shape youth, the report said.

"Sports plays an irreplaceable role in the formation of young people's thinking and character, mental development and aesthetic formation," the meeting declared.

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